

## Global Rich-Poor Gap Widens

The UNDP's annual Human Development Report—this being the third—released worldwide last Thursday confirms what we all suspected. The world in the last three decades has become a far more unjust place economically, while dramatic changes heralding freedom in many previous dictatorships have made it a far better place politically. The report once again proves, if proof was at all necessary, that the world's rich countries have become even richer with the richest five per cent of the population earning an income that is 150 times more than the poorest five per cent. In its reference to protectionism, the report reveals the duplicity of the industrialised countries at its worst. The trade and market restrictions imposed by the developing countries on the imports from the poor 'distant cousins' cost the developing countries a staggering US\$ 500 billion in trade. In comparison, only about US\$ 50 billion is given to the so-called Third World as aid. The protectionist picture becomes particularly unpalatable in the background of all the surmounting that the developing countries are subjected to on the virtues of free trade. The UNDP Report is right on target when it says that "the developing countries enter the world market as unequals and leave it as unequals." In what could well be termed as an indirect warning to the immigrant weary developed countries the report says, "If opportunities do not travel towards people, people will travel towards opportunities". In a strong argument for greater action by the rich countries to spread the fruits of development the report points out that environmental degradation, drug abuse, disease and political instability are all caused by poverty and their removal is a precondition for international peace, stability and prosperity.

As can be expected the Report calls for removal of trade barriers, increase in development aid and cuts in defense expenditure, whose mere 3 per cent reduction through the 90s will create a staggering 'peace dividend' to the tune of US\$ 1500 billion in the industrialised nations and US\$ 300 billion in the developing countries. The UNDP report deserves high marks for some of the new ideas that it suggests. The proposal for a United Nations Development Security Council of 22 members, with 11 permanent and 11 rotating ones, to co-ordinate policies of aid, debt, ecology and development is a timely and thought-provoking suggestion. The ideas for global income tax, for resource redistribution, for a global central bank for monetary discipline—are strong indications that UNDP is now leading the UN system in coming up with new ideas. The proposal for a privately funded watchdog body—Honesty International—to monitor and reveal international corruption is novel and deserves careful attention of the international community. We definitely could have used it during the regime of Ershad, as could the Philippines during that of Marcos.

The report could take cognizance of the democratisation of the political system in Bangladesh which results in our moving from the 136th to the 135th position in its Human Development Index (HDI). It points out that a 3 per cent reduction of US\$ 370 million annual military expenditure in Bangladesh will result in US\$ 97 million savings by the year 2000.

The UNDP Human Development Report this year deserves to be read by policy makers not only for some very incisive and thought provoking analysis but also for the bold and creative suggestions that it makes. It should receive widest possible coverage by the media.

## Passing of a Genius

Ray is no more. In Tagore the peoples of the subcontinent found a kind of centrality. At the same time his was a universal genius heralding a new kind of humanism—universalism. In the half century following his passing there emerged another talent from the same Bengal Renaissance stock which fast matured into a genius manifesting both of those aspects. And exactly as Tagore had done in the case of world literature, Satyajit Ray did not only put the subcontinent on the map of world cinema, he carved in enduring images the psyche or the essence of Bengality on world culture.

All in the subcontinent will feel a stab in the heart over the news that was on every lip by Thursday evening. And men of culture all over the world would feel a true sense of loss, many of them more than some in India would do. In France and Japan, in Spain and Sweden, there will be people grieving over Ray's death as if they had been overtaken by some personal tragedy.

Although Ray made his way into the Hall of Immortals through breaking entirely new grounds in a medium that Tagore in late life was much averse to, the great film-maker has a singular distinction of transforming high literature into the celluloid—into high film. Right from his debut with that Bibhutibhusan literary classic, Pather Panchali, which by most critical appraisal remains his magnum opus, to his last significant work, he clung to literature with love and dedication. This gave him that magic touch—extremely local and almost private flavours and colours and nuances plucking at the strings in the heart of the universal man.

Ray was the complete director. From scripting to music and from recording to photography, he did about everything that was in most of his films, so his films became a realisation in totality of the vision he had of man and his world. After that it must baffle understanding as to how he also became one of the masters of Bengali literature, a doyen in his own right in the genre of juvenile literature. And add to that the fact that he almost wrought a revolution in book-cover design whose influence will last longer than anyone else's. Although Leela Majumdar, the literary stalwart, survives Satyajit, in his passing the house of Upendrakishore Ray comes to a glorious stop—the house which, like the one at Jorasanko, was the springboard for many-sided geniuses.

In Satyajit the East-West twin met measure for measure without compromising his one hundred percent Bengality.

We shall cherish the legacy of Satyajit Ray more than any other people as it is our humanity in supremely degrading conditions he has portrayed with love and not without a sense of pride. As the world mourns his death, ours would be specially sad for his art specially belongs to us—the Bengali speakers of the world.

# India Can Draw Lessons from UK Polls

The limited verdict will now influence the style of Prime Minister John Major's governance. He will be conscious of the fact that the people have been squeamish in returning his party. Whatever he does will have a stamp of accommodation to the sensitivities of Labour, which has gained 40 seats at his party's expense.

ONE remark still heard in parliament's central hall on the 21-member majority of the Conservatives is: Why does not the Labour arrange the defection of a dozen MPs to come to power? Hypothetically, it is possible because there is no anti-defection law in the UK to unseat a member who crosses the floor. But otherwise it is unthinkable that any member will be tray the confidence of the electorate, who returns him on a particular party ticket. Never will a political party engineer defection, as the Congress (I) did recently in the Lok Sabha. Nor is there an Aya Ram or Gaya Ram in Britain.

When Chandra Shekhar bolted the Janata Dal with 60 odd members in 1990 to constitute the government, I still in London after having resigned from the high commissionership, was asked to explain the development. I said it was like Michael Heseltine, a Tory leader, quitting the party out of pique and forming the government with the support of Labour. In context of Britain's political ethos, such a phenomenon is simply not imaginable. Institutions are so strong there that political chicanery, the likes of which are witnessed in India, does not prevail.

The limited verdict will now influence the style of Prime Minister John Major's governance. He will be conscious of the fact that the people have been squeamish in returning his party. Whatever he does will have a stamp of accommodation to the sensitivities of Labour, which has gained 40 seats at his party's expense. This is political ethics.

For example, he will not take such drastic steps in the economic field as have been effected by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, who is worse off because he does not enjoy even a bare majority. If Major were to take a U-turn on the established policies—what Narasimha Rao has done with impunity—he would go for a midterm poll to get a specific mandate. In no case will Major bypass the Labour chief, the opposition leader. Narasimha Rao does not even consult L K Advani the opposition leader, much less others and continues to operate in his own devious way, which the prime minister characterises as the consensus.

Another lesson for India is how Major, during the campaign, was able to reconcile the demands for conformity by the European Economic Community to Britain's doggedness to stay alone, independent. He has got across to the people the message that economic uniformity does not necessarily mean obedience to political fiat of a parliament sitting at Brussels. And he has maintained the balance.

In contrast, the Narasimha Rao government has been at the beck and call of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, foreign investors or, for that matter, Washington. This must have disappointed many nations around the globe. If the UK can resist the pressure of EEC—much more severe and sweeping—why should not a country of India's size object to

Washington's dictates?

Tony Benn, a radical, who has been unfortunately defeated, used to tell me that New Delhi was the one capital which could halt the march "by the West towards white imperialism." He has more faith in India than we have in our own country. I was amazed to find his unflinching confidence in our moral and spiritual heritage. He must have been paid to see Narasimha Rao's abject surrender before the god of Mammon.

The debacle of the Scottish National Party, which fought

with the say they have in their affairs. He will have to seriously consider the demand for decentralisation of power. Narasimha Rao should also be thinking on the same lines but he is too busy politicking.

Many in India got unnecessarily perturbed over the observations by Roy Hattersley, the Labour's outgoing deputy leader, and Gerald Kaufman, shadow foreign secretary, over Kashmir. They were primarily placating their constituents from Jammu and Kashmir. Neil Kinnock, the outgoing Labour chief, was aware of their irre-

Shimla agreement. Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd chided Labour for having raked up Kashmir during the elections. The Tory party has said more than once that the Shimla agreement should govern the solution of Kashmir but that also requires a dialogue between New Delhi and Islamabad.

My feeling is that the Major government will make us move towards that direction. New Delhi's assurance to London that it will hold elections in Kashmir by the end of this year may only be a ritual if the militants in Kashmir are not associated with the process. For that the talks with them will be essential. The five Kashmiri leaders, released recently, can pave the way.

I feel sorry for Kinnock, who perforce has resigned from the leadership of the Labour. He has done a tremendous job for the party. Before he took it over, the Labour was notoriously divided and was an argumentative political grouping that devoted as much energy to intra-party feuds as it did to fighting the Conservatives. That he had effected discipline within the party and brought it to the position of a potential ruling party was his biggest achievement.

When I was in London, Labour had the image of a centrist party. Kinnock's own personal popularity was not high but the party believed it would form the next government. I hoped Kinnock would make it. But something within me told

me that he lacked a certain quality demanded by the highest office. He was likeable as a neighbour but whether one would go to the extent of asking him to look after one's house was doubtful. I also had the strong feeling that Labour had been cashing in on the Conservatives' troubles; to defend its own independent views on solving the country's problems would mean entering into an altogether different debate.

The fall of Kinnock has also a lesson for the Indian leaders. Once the people reject them they should have the decency to step down and not try to occupy official positions through the back door. In no way should they project themselves as leaders of the party. Rajiv Gandhi should have resigned after the Congress (I)'s defeat in the 1989 elections; V P Singh should have followed suit in the wake of the Janata Dal's debacle in 1991. This has nothing to do with the merit of the leaders. This is the fulfilment of their moral responsibility to their followers.

The return of the Conservatives should be an opportunity for New Delhi to strengthen its relations with London. The two countries have come a long way after President Venkataraman's visit in 1990 in removing many irritants between them. They should build upon the understanding they have developed and go beyond the Indo-British relationship to try to have an identical approach to the world problems. It would be a pity if both were to go apart again.

Mr Nayar is a former High Commissioner for India to Britain.

## Between the Lines Kuldip Nayar

on the plank of independence should be an eye opener to the separatists in India. The pro-Khalistan elements, despite their staunch opposition, could not defeat Pira Khabra, a Labour candidate, who has stood firmly against the demand for the vivisection of India. Even the right of self-determination has limits; it cannot be extended to every ethnic group spread over a small tract of land. A federal structure, with power going down all the way to the grassroots, is an emerging phenomena in the world.

Major must have realised that the Scottish pater of power does not satisfy Scotland and eve regional parties of Wales and Northern Ireland are far from happy

responsible statements and he always rectified them. He could not do so during the recent election and probably lost 10 to 12 seats where the people of Indian origin predominated.

I know Kinnock firmly believes in the Shimla Agreement, a bilateral approach to solve the Kashmir issue. When before the annual Labour conference in Liverpool in 1990, I pointed out to him that Kashmir had been included on the agenda for discussion, he had it deleted. Even Kaufman at that time told me that India should not worry because "a discussion on Kashmir" was not Labour's policy.

The Tory government is categorically in favour of the

# Kenyan Women Fight for a Place in the Political Sun

Charles M. Ngugi writes from Nairobi

The campaign for multi-partyism in Kenya has generated a debate about the role of women in politics. Traditionally they have been confined to home with little role in the political process. Out of 200 parliamentarians only two are women. But with democracy the buzzword, many women are now demanding a greater say in decision-making.

THE coming of political pluralism in Kenya gives women the chance to influence the direction and scope of the new democratisation process. Although women make up the largest bloc of voters, they are poorly represented in the key decision-making institutions.

Last December the ruling Kenya African national Union (KANU) gave up its monopoly of political power. At least 20 parties have been formed, yet the policy documents of most of them give little attention to women. Not surprisingly, women are upset.

Environmentalist Waangari Maathai, who was beaten unconscious when she took part in a street demonstration in Nairobi, is active with one of the main parties, the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD). She has been quoted as saying that she might contest the presidency.

Dr. Maria Nzomo, a lecturer at the University of Nairobi, says "Kenya's record of women's participation in politics and public decision-making is pathetic by any standards."

From 1963 to 1969 there was not a single female Member of Parliament. The first was elected in 1969, when another was nominated (there were 11 male nominated members). This represented 0.5 per cent of those elected and eight per cent of the nominated parliamentarians.

Except for the period 1974-79, when women's representation improved slightly,



WANGARI MAATHAI  
Fearless campaigner who was beaten up

the general trend has been towards their marginalisation in political decision-making at the national level.

Out of 200 elected and nominated MPs today, there are two female elected members and none nominated. Of these one sits in the front bench as an assistant minister for culture and social services.

Since 1974, when the first women are appointed to the front bench, the post of assistant minister is the highest

position a woman has ever held in the National Assembly—and there has never been more than one woman holding such a high post at any one time.

The lone female assistant minister has always been appointed to serve in the relatively insignificant ministry of culture and social services.

Moreover in KANU no woman was elected or appointed to any national executive position until 1989 when the party created a directorship in charge of women and youth affairs and appointed a woman to head it.

Outside politics, the presence and participation of women in public decision-making has been equally dismal, with most of the prominent women being presidential appointees, starting from the early Eighties.

The first female judge of the high court was appointed in 1982 followed by one in 1986 and another in 1991. In 1983, two women were appointed to head parastatal organisations and at least 15 others were appointed in 1986.

In the same year, President Daniel arap Moi appointed two

women to senior diplomatic positions, one as representative to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), replacing another who had earlier resigned from the post. The second became the first female High Commissioner to Britain.

Dr. Nazomo says only nine per cent of those in top civil service jobs are women. In other critical public decision-making sectors, such as the trade union movement, women's representation is tiny. Some unions have no women members and in others women do not hold leadership or decision-making positions.

In the private sector too, women have few positions in the top hierarchy of large corporations, although a significant number are to be found in the middle management level. Female activists say that, despite political pluralism, Kenya's claim to be democratic can be contested simply because of the marginalisation of women in politics and decision-making.

And yet in many other areas women's rights have been compromised, ignored or trampled on. Rape, sexual harassment and derogatory

language used by some male politicians to depict women as inferior violate human rights.

Safeguarding human rights is the top of the agenda for all proponents of multiparty politics. "And yet," argues Dr. Nzomo, "the frequency with which these forms of physical and psychological violence on women occur, and the casualness and the light punitive legal action meted out to the perpetrators of these human rights abuses against women, clearly demonstrate that the male-dominated Kenyan society has not yet appreciated the full meaning of democracy."

Female activists resent the insensitivity on gender issues shown by many of the emerging political parties. They are particularly opposed to being lumped together with youth in what has routinely been referred to as the "women and youth wing."

Only the democratic Party of Kenya (DP) proposes to increase women's participation in politics "in a somewhat meaningful way," as Dr. Kibutha Kibwana, a constitutional expert at the University of Nairobi, prefers to call it.

The party commits itself to nominating more women to parliament and generally seeks

to maintain a high proportion of women in its various units.

But, says Mrs. Eddah Gachukia, a former nominated MP and chairperson of the African Women Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), women want to be in the mainstream of the political system, not on the periphery being handed out "tokens" by way of a few nominated seats in parliament and a few other nominated positions.

Some men are not taking this upsurge in activity by women lightly. One obscure political party has as its main objective the return of women to their traditional roles in African society—cooks, child-bearers, servants.

Some men have called women "opportunists" out to cash in on the freedom few of them fought for. They say that those detained, tortured, exiled or who otherwise suffered for demanding political pluralism, were mainly men.

One problem women seem to be ignoring is sure to waken any plans to form a united block of voters—ethnic division. Experience shows ethnic considerations weigh more with women voters than ideological or gender considerations.

For this reason, many women may not vote for a woman who is not from their tribe when a rival party has fielded a male candidate who is.

CHARLES M. NGUGI is on the staff of the Weekly Review, Nairobi's leading weekly newsmagazine.

## To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

### Whither justice?

Sir, On April 9 last, Rima's family observed the third death (murder) anniversary of Rima Sharmil who was killed by her husband Munir three years ago. The lower court has already awarded death sentences to Munir and a co-accused Khuku. But the judgement is yet to be endorsed by the higher court in response to the appeal filed by the sentenced persons.

Legal formalities are to be maintained before sentencing punishment to any criminal and we do honour these formalities. But the time consumed by the court for these formalities to complete is really frustrating which reminds us the saying—"Justice delayed, justice denied".

A few days ago, a lady was manhandled by some of his office colleagues in the broad daylight. But as reported by the BTV's "Drishtikon", the doctors delayed in performing her medical examination. This is really shameful and unacceptable incident in a civilized and religious society of ours!

We would strongly call upon the authorities concerned to ensure timely dispensation of

justice and awarding of exemplary punishments to the notorious criminals.

M Zahidul Haque  
Assistant Professor, BAC,  
Dhaka.

### Neglected region

Sir, This has reference to the opinion piece "Neglected Northern Region" in The Daily Star, April 14, by Md. Anwarul Afzal. I want to write a few lines of my own in addition to what has been said by him.

It is a fact that the whole of Bangladesh is under developed. The greater Barisal, Noakhali and Sylhet districts require special attention. Specially the people of Noakhali and Barisal districts are compelled to migrate to other districts of Bangladesh because of river erosion and tidal bore which have crippled the economy of these two districts.

I think the Divisional Development Authority should be given wider powers and some powers should also be delegated to the District Development Authority.

Instead of thinking on a regional basis and creating

regional feelings let us think on the basis of individual districts as the development unit.

Observation of the southern region will bear me out that two districts namely Chittagong and Comilla, are given preference in all spheres of public life.

In spite of the fact that Karnaphuly Hydro Electric dam is situated in Chittagong, thanks to Ziauddin Babu, another big turbo electric generating plant has been set up there.

Co-operative movement in Comilla changed the lot of iccing masses of that district but unfortunately the movement could not cross the Comilla district border.

Sometime in 1979, when I was a student of the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, a group of students were invited to see the co-operative activities in Comilla. As a member of that group I had the opportunity to see some of the projects of the Co-operative societies there. The name of "Deedar Co-operative Society" is worth mentioning. The cooperative movement can change the beggar's hands into productive hands.

M. Saleem Ullah Advocate  
Motijheel C/A, Dhaka.

### BTV and cricket

Sir, It fills my heart with sorrow to write this complaining letter but I write it to give vent to my suppressed

emotions and hope this message will be heard loud and clear. On Friday April 17, I witnessed the Final Match of the recently concluded Gold Leaf Championship Cricket Tournament on TV. It was very thoughtful of BTV to decide to telecast the highlights of the exciting match between Sylhet DSA and Chittagong DSA. However, it was an anticlimax; the commentary and the camera work were equally abysmal. Every time a ball was dispatched to the boundary the camera wobbled as if an earthquake had hit the national stadium. At least five to six outs were not shown as the cameraman was busy showing us our stadium and the few spectators present. The commentary too left a lot to be desired. Batsmen and bowlers were not named on a number of occasions. It seemed as if the commentators had not done their homework. They also had difficulty counting runs. On the whole it was a pathetic performance by BTV.

Since they decided to be generous enough to telecast the highlights they should have put up a much better show. The standard of our camera work and commentary has been bad, but that Friday's performance marked the pinnacle of BTV's failure. I know we are a poor country and our resources are limited but that is no excuse for nonchalance and complacency. Come on BTV, pull your socks up!

Rabul Hasan (Shajal)  
Dept. of English, DU.

## OPINION

### Dinner for a Thousand Guests

The earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed"—Mahatma Gandhi.

"An unequal word which ordains that many must go hungry is an unsafe word. Islands of affluence within seas of want, are more than an affront to morality or a change to piety".—Shridath Ramphal.

Recently I attended a marriage feast in which a thousand people were invited for dinner. The menu for dinner was a long one and the approximate cost could not be less than Tk. 100/= per person. At the end of the dinner, it was observed that nearly one-fourth of the edibles were totally wasted. The guests all of whom appeared to be well fed and well heeled did not required the sumptuous meal at all. But on the other hand, the food may have harmed their health. There are clear Government orders (repeated periodically) that no one person can invite more than 100 people as guests for dinner. It is, however, provided in the Government order that extra guests may be entertained if a tax per head of Tk. 10/= is deposited in the Government treasury. I tried to find out if permission was obtained for the additional 900 guests. It was informed that Tk. 1000/= only were deposited for the additional guests.

Now it is a common sight that huge number of guests are being entertained throughout the city every evening in the innumerable community centres, which are visible in every nook and corner.

The World Bank in its reports and assessment repeatedly states that our per capita domestic savings is meagre and marginal. In this context it is not totally immoral to invite so many guests when 3/4th of our people are below the poverty line?

The total amount of Tk. 1,00,000/= which was spent for dinner could have secured ICB Units or the shares of some profitable companies or an investment in the Post Office. The same amount could have provided improved diets for ten thousand residents of the children's homes. The spent amount could have been the savings of a Government officer for a period of 10 to 15 years.

The Government has to rigidly apply the Guest Control Order or remove this from the statute book.

The democratic Government of the day has to take the lead in matters of austerity and economy in all spheres of our life.

Shahabuddin Mahtab  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka